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CHAPTER III.

Nilotic Tribes of Kavirondo.

101 The generic name used of these peoples by themselves is Ja-Luo. The Bantu Kavirondo people call them Awa-Nyoro. A very common term for them is Wa-Nife.

231 241 361 *Modes of subsistence.*—They all live by agriculture. They reside in fixed villages of from ten to fifty huts. Nearly all the villages are surrounded by euphorbia hedges; formerly many villages had mud and occasionally stone walls, but this custom has died out. They breed cattle, sheep, goats, and fowls.

[224] 226 *Hunting and fishing.*—They dig pitfalls for elephants and also spear elephants. They catch large quantities of fish in the Lake Victoria Nyanza by means of large conical wicker traps "*dema*." The process is as follows:—They have two enormously long ropes; one end of each rope is secured on shore, and the ropes are then paid out into the lake, one rope floats on the surface and from it hangs a fringe of papyrus stalks; the other rope is a ground rope, and is weighted with stones, and the two ropes are connected at intervals. By means of canoes these ropes are gradually brought round in a semi-circle the size of which gradually decreases. The fish rush shorewards to escape from the drawing in of the net, and rush into the mouth of the big wicker traps which are placed in a row in the shallow water near the shore. At the same time the women walk up and down dragging smaller meshed traps in which they collect myriads of tiny fish the size of a sardine. They fish a great deal at night by torchlight. They state that they get the best hauls of fish after rain; in the dry season they catch [824] comparatively few. Rafts of ambatch wood are used for laying out the net (ambatch is a very light spongy wood growing on the lake shore; it has a prickly [439] bark). They split and dry large quantities of fish and carry it inland from the lake for considerable distances to sell for grain.

227 601 Lines and hooks are also used to a certain extent by the Nyakach people and others. The people bordering the lake possess a few dug-out canoes and also a few of the sewn canoes bought from Baganda or Basoga.

441 *Bridges.*—They build rough bridges of timber across the rivers when in flood, but not suspension bridges like the North Kavirondo.

264 252 *Cooking, etc.*—They cook in earthen pots inside their huts, and also in the verandah of the huts. All cooking is done by women. The food is served up in little baskets. The father eats with his sons; they generally eat in a little separate hut with open sides built for the purpose. Women eat separately and inside the house.

372 *Fire.*—They know the use of firesticks but rarely need them, as they can always obtain a glowing ember from one or other of their neighbours.

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Their huts are very similar to those of the Bantu Kavirondo, but they are a trifle lower, and are generally built solely of reeds (*mabua*). The huts are dug out inside to a depth of 18 inches or 2 feet; the hut is plastered with the earth dug out from the interior. 342

There are two fire-places in each hut, and the customs previously enumerated about stopping at the first or second cooking place are the same as among the Bantu Kavirondo. 354

Young girls sleep in a hut with the other girls of the village in the care of an old woman. The boys of the village sleep in a hut by themselves. The villages are roughly circular. The huts are not arranged in any particular order, but the huts of one man are generally side by side. The huts of the young men are usually near the gates, and they are supposed to watch the gates in case of any attempt being made to steal the cattle. 513 361 883

On entering a village the hut directly opposite the gate is generally the hut of the principal wife of the headman of the village, or the headman of that part of the village. 361

Food products.—Mtama, sweet potatoes, a little *wimbi*, Indian corn, and also pumpkins, semsem, and pulse (*pojo*). Bananas are occasionally grown, but they do not flourish, as the country is a little too dry for them. A little tobacco and Indian hemp are grown. The Indian corn is not ground but generally eaten in an unripe state. 241

Ironwork.—They do not smelt iron, neither do they forge their hoes, which are all imported from Samia. They however forge spears, knives, bill hooks, axes, etc., from Samia iron. Among the Gemi tribe only people belonging to a clan called Uvino forge iron; the smiths are called Yothet-th. A rough kind of salt is made from the ashes of reeds and grass, and salt is also imported from Kisingiri. 325 439 258

Death customs.—When a person dies the body is immediately taken out of the house. Upon the death of a woman the brothers-in-law of the deceased dig the grave in the verandah of the house of the deceased; the corpse is buried on its left side with the hand under the head; the body is doubled up. A man, on the contrary, is buried on his right side with the hand under the head. In the case of a woman her relations and friends come and wail; her husband presents each clan that attends with a goat, the mourners stay three days. 764

The hut in which a person has died is used for a month; the neighbours then meet and drink *tembo*, and the house is broken down. Upon the death of a man his brother digs his grave; if the first wife he married is still alive he is buried in her house; if she is dead the man is buried in the verandah of the hut in which he died. [768]

Men only wail for one day, after that only women wail; the women wail for the whole of the first three days; after that the women of the village wail at dawn for fifteen days. 765

Signs of mourning.—Women wear a string of banana fibre round the forehead, they also wear a tail of white strings for about a month; the tail usually

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Ordeals.—They have a form of ordeal called Kiviri; a small pot of water is taken and a little *wimbi* flour and a bit of the medicine are put into the water; if the mixture boils over the man is guilty, and *vice versâ*.

Another ordeal is as follows: a piece of calabash open at both ends is placed on a stone in a bowl of water (Fig. 12). Water is ladled up from the bowl and poured into the calabash, and normally it immediately runs out where the calabash rests on the stone; the medicine man however puts some medicine into the water, and if the man is guilty the water no longer runs out at the bottom of the calabash, and eventually the water runs over the top. I have seen this performed and found that it was the medicine that enabled the calabash to be filled; this medicine was the crushed up leaves of a kind of mimosa, and being of a fibrous nature it stopped up the points of leakage between the calabash and the stone. There is another trial by ordeal: some dry flour is given to the suspected person, if innocent he can swallow it, and *vice versâ*.

FIG. 12.—THE ORDEAL OF THE CALABASH, OFTEN USED FOR THE DETECTION OF THIEVES, ETC.

787

Omens.—If the omen bird cries out on the left side of the road it is bad if the journey is for war, but if the journey is a mere visit the person will get food. If the bird cries out on the right side it is good for war but bad for visiting. If a cat crosses the road from right to left it is a good omen, if *vice versâ* it is bad. If you see a rat on the road and it runs in front of you it is a good, but if it crosses the road it is an inauspicious sign.

[777]

In some clans it is lucky for the first child to be female and in others it is *vice versâ*.

If on a journey a man strikes his little toe on either foot it is a very bad sign, if he strikes the big toe it is propitious. If a man whose eldest child is a boy is travelling and the first person he meets is a man it is a good sign, but if a woman it is bad, and *vice versâ* if his eldest child is a girl.

They profess to be able to tell whether a man will be killed on an expedition or not by examining the entrails of an ox or sheep. Some even say that in this way a skilled soothsayer will prophesy future events; for instance, he will perhaps say that in so many days news of fighting will arrive, or that a certain disease will appear, or that in say three days a white cow will arrive at the village.

[241]

The head chief of each tribe decides when the people are to plant their crops, and some chiefs are said to be able to foretel whether the harvest will be good or bad. The chief Odera is said to have prophesied the advent of European rule when he was quite young. They go to the Nyole rainmaker Mgahanya for rain, and also went to his father Ligiri.

551

Names.—Many names of men and women are the same, others again only differ in the first letter; for instance, Apio is generally a female name and Opio a male name.

789 elders gathered to offer sacrifice and supplicate the local spirit,
782 together with the clan spirits, in times of great drought, but this is
776 entirely different from the rain-making cult. Even in this instance, it is doubtful whether the ceremony has not been influenced in large measure by the neighbouring Bantu peoples. The particular guardian spirit of this hill, is reputed to be a fabulously big snake, so enormous as to be able to encircle the hill with its body. Away from the Lake shore, which suffers most from uncertain rainfall, the Luo account very easily for the fact that they have no rain-makers. They simply say that they never have lack of rain, so why should they have rain-makers.

791 But though they have no rain-makers, they have a term for rain-maker, whom they call "Jajimb koth." When they need a rain-maker they employ either a Bantu from the Basiekwe clan of the Banyole, or one from Mudhiero, Yiro in Marama. And, of course, it is not alone for agriculture that rain is needed. The fishing in the rivers suffers greatly when the rivers run low, and fishermen not infrequently call in the aid of the rain-maker. On the lower reaches
[782] of the Nzoia River, there existed a custom now happily extinct, according to which human sacrifice was made to the spirit of the river. The unfortunate person to be sacrificed was a girl, generally a young one and ill-favoured, who was bound, and some accounts say stunned, before being cast into the river. Rain-makers still flourish, though shorn of much of their influence and tribute. Only a few years ago I was in Uyoma during a time of rain shortage. I happened to be collecting genealogies, and was visiting the old men for this purpose. The conversation turned on the lack of rain, and I asked had they sent for the rain-maker. I really did not expect that they would have done so, and was somewhat surprised to find that they had sent their offerings to one of the Bantu of the Basiekwe clan. It seemed a pity that they should waste their substance on what could do them no
[609] earthly good, so I spent some time trying to convince them that the rain-maker had no power to bring rain. They listened very politely, but at the end of it were "of the same opinion still." I left them gently poking fun at them for being so credulous. I was about a mile or less from my camp, and during my walk home, suddenly, from nowhere, clouds rushed up, a violent rain storm pelted down and I got thoroughly drenched. I would have given a good deal to have been able to listen to the comments of those who had heard so politely my well-meant arguments. Incidents somewhat like this are, no doubt, responsible for the deep seated faith in the rain-makers' powers. It did not convince me.

241 The preparation of the soil for the seed was, and is, performed
791 without any ceremony of invocation preceding it, except when the land had been taken in conquest from enemies. In the latter case the

241 791 " Jabilo " or leading medicine-man of the community concerned performed a sacrifice or " misango " the purpose of which was to render ineffectual any harmful magic left behind in the soil by those from whom it had been taken. It occasionally happens even to-day that a cultivator will suspect that an enemy has buried " yath " or harmful medicine in a field. In this case no preparation of the soil of this field for a crop is begun until a diviner has been consulted in order to find out the enemy. The Luo have a great faith in the power of the diviner to discover an enemy. That the diviner denounces people, and that he is oft times right, cannot be denied. Sometimes it may be guess work, as when there has been a notorious quarrel and it is simple to suspect the other party in the quarrel, but at times the medicine man has more certain sources of information. In the year 1910 I had the good fortune to get into rather friendly relationships with a medicine man who had become a Christian. In one of our conversations I asked him how it was possible to divine a wrongdoer. He told me that it was generally very easy. If a man wished to put down medicine, he had to procure it from a medicine man. Or, if he proposed to rob his neighbour he applied to the medicine man for protective medicine. Following upon the injury or the robbery, the injured party applied to the local medicine man in order to find out the enemy. If the injured person was prepared to pay a fee exceeding that paid by the enemy, the medicine man had no scruples about giving his client away. But I do not say that this is a complete explanation of all the powers of divination exercised by medicine men. Still, there can be no doubt that often both parties consult the same diviner, just as at times in our own social life both parties to a lawsuit will approach the same lawyer. Perhaps I had better safeguard myself. I am not, please, to be understood as implying that a lawyer will give his client away.

241 In the preparation of the soil for the crop, all members of the family who are fit, take their share. Only in bush country, where there is heavy clearing to be done, is the work left to the men. This operation is called " beto." In all other types of land there is no discrimination between the sexes, even where tall grass, called " olenge," has to be dug up. But there is a certain amount of discrimination amongst the age groups. When a man has advanced in years, and younger members of his family are sufficient for food production, he leaves it to them, while he devotes himself to less arduous tasks, possibly herding, or some form of social service such as the elders perform in settling the lawsuits of the clan.

241 887

241 The next operation after "beto " is " puro," the turning over of the soil. Where weeds or grass have been heavy, this is followed by " wang'o " or burning. In sandy, stony or red soil, sowing the seed

241 comes next, but in cotton soil, there is further preparation by breaking up the clods, getting a fine tilth. This is called " buso." I well remember my surprise, and critical attitude, when first I noticed that sowing was done without any attempt being made to break up the rough grass-matted clods. However, the crop, which happened to be " bel " or millet, which resulted from these primitive methods, was, a heavy one. I was told that the clods afforded protection to the young seedlings.

With regard to the sowing or planting [redacted] terms are used. Broadcast sowing, as of millet, simsim and [redacted] called " chwoyo " or " ludo." The planting of each seed individually, as with maize, is termed " komo," while the planting of cassava and sweet potatoes is known as " pidho."

24 805 821 Under the system now fast dying out, sowing was surrounded by many taboos. First of all, was the knowing the time to sow. In a normal year there are two sowings, one in the early part of the year, February or March, and one during the shorter rains about September-October. The slower growing crops were put down in the spring, and the quicker crops in the autumn. For the spring sowing guidance was sought from the stars. Amongst a people who had no names for the months of the year, natural phenomena had to be relied upon. These the stars supplied, and especially the constellations of Orion and the Pleiades. These two constellations are called by one name " Yugini " by the Luo. They further differentiate by calling the three stars of Orion's belt, the " chuo " or " men," and the cluster of the Pleiades the " mon " or " women." (The men are obviously polygamists.) When the time of the year comes round during which these stars are observed shortly after nightfall, to be about midway between the zenith and the horizon, then they know that sowing time has arrived. No matter how good the rains may have been before these stars reach the traditional position none must sow, and, conversely, if rains do not come by the time the stars say that sowing ought to be done, there are dismal forebodings about the crop. The Luo say that if the millet (their main food crop), has not flowered by the month when these stars dip below the horizon shortly after nightfall, then there will be a poor harvest and scarcity of food.

241 825 Other natural phenomena which guide them are birds. There is a bird called by the Luo " Ondiek ti oyieng " (" the wild beasts are well fed ") which has a very monotonous three note cry. Some Europeans call it the brain fever bird, from the deadly monotony of this call. The Luo have given words to this cry " Dak tu kom " meaning " Aren't you going to sow to-day." There is another bird, called " Oliech ga apol " which follows behind the digger for the insects turned up with the soil. The presence of these birds is held to

241 826 indicate that sowing time is at hand. In the autumn, there is the ordinary African kite, which comes over literally, at times, in thousands, feeding in the air, and on the ground on the swarms of flying ants. Some withhold their sowing until these birds appear.

241 782 In exceptional cases an important sacrifice, called " bilo " was performed before sowing took place. If the " Jaduong' bilo " was warned in a dream of impending disaster to the coming season's food supply, he called the elders of the community together for the purpose of the ceremony. " Bilo " was performed to avert any disaster threatening the community. It was always performed in the early morning, before the cattle had gone out to graze. The present " Jabilo " in Sakwa location performed the ceremony of " bilo " in 1931 when the people of Sakwa had a boundary dispute with their neighbours of Asembo. He performed it again in the early months of 1933 to get rid of the locusts. It is natural that not a few in Sakwa attribute the absence of locusts this year to the effect of this ceremony.

241 177 [626] When the time was ripe for sowing, the " Mikayi " or chief wife of the head of the community, was always the first to sow. None dare begin their sowing until the " mikayi " had thus given permission. Any who were so bold as to begin before the " mikayi " were made to feel the displeasure of the community. As recently as 1931 I have known a man to come under discipline for sowing too soon. But what with the efforts of the Agricultural Department, pressing upon the people the wisdom of early sowing, together with a widespread knowledge of the names of the months, re-inforced by the rise of individualism accompanied by the breakdown of tribal authority, the influence of the " mikayi " is steadily waning. Amongst the more advanced sections of the communities it has ceased to exist, and they are no longer subject to discipline for early sowing. After sowing comes a pause, but not for long. About April weeding begins. This is shared in by all. Amongst the sturdier crops, it is done by the hoe, but in crops like the small millet, called " kal," the seed is sown too closely for there to be room for a hoe, so it has to be done by hand, the weeders squatting down on their heels and pulling up the weeds. This results in a much trampled crop, but it very soon recovers, and suffers no damage. In recent years the Administration has made great efforts to get people to eradicate the striga weed, called by the Luo " hayongo." This weed shoots up, curiously enough, after the customary weeding has been done. The Luo let it grow in spite of the fact that they know that land infested with it must be left for a term of years. I have over and over again tried to persuade them of the wisdom and benefit of getting rid of it, but to no avail. Anything which comes after the routine weeding has been done is allowed to remain.

241 [788] Besides weeding, there is much to be done to protect the crop. Hail storms do a lot of damage at times, and to protect the crops a " medicine " is employed called ' migalo magalo pe." This consists of herbs tied in a bunch to the top of a pole about 6—8 feet high, which is stuck in the middle of the field. (Herdsmen too, use this [231] to keep themselves dry while out with the cattle, and I have seen a herdsman accompanying the cows with these herbs tied to the top [674] of his spear.) Except in time of famine, stealing from the crop is unknown, which contrasts favourably with complaints made from time to time that Natives steal maize and coffee from European farms. In their own community such an offence is practically unknown. But 241 four-legged depredators are a serious problem in certain localities. 417 Fields are enclosed in fences of the branches of thorn trees, laid on the ground, and these do give a certain protection against wild pigs, 136 monkeys and baboons. But they are of no use against hippo and elephant. To protect crops, mainly sweet potato, against the hippo it is the practice to erect a small temporary hut, which is occupied at night by a guard armed with a couple of spears. It must be a weary business, for the potatoes are cultivated close to the lake edge where mosquitoes swarm, so between the hippo and the mosquitoes the guard [224] must have a trying time. In old days before the Game laws came in, organized hunts were held, which were very successful.

241 The most difficult animal is, of course, the elephant. These have 136 disappeared from Central Kavirondo but still infest districts like Mirunda and Sakwa in South Kavirondo. They can do heavy damage both to millet and sweet potato. The beating of pots and pans is tried to scare away the elephant, while occasionally the more daring venture forth from the hut to throw stones or otherwise drive away the beasts. This is an operation attended with peril in the dark of the night, and occasionally lives are lost in this way. Lives too are lost through guards mistaking their fellow guards for wild animals. Jok, one of the most famous of ancestors of the Luo, is said to have lost his life in this way. The story is that before going off to drink beer, he told his sons to go on guard in the field that night. They refused to his face, but when he had gone thought better of it, and went on guard. He returned from the beer drink, and went to see what was happening in the field, believing that there was no guard. His sons mistook his footsteps for that of a pig, and speared him with fatal results. Similar things still occur from time to time.

241 Birds, especially weaver birds, are a pest as the grain crop 136 ripens. Scarecrows are employed, both mechanical and human. Of the former an inverted cooking pot on the top of a short pole is a 857 common device. Boys are employed in large numbers when the birds are most troublesome, and their harsh [illegible] are quite a part of the

241 life of the countryside. Ofttimes the boys are armed with slings from
136 which stones are projected at random into the midst of the crop, or
857 into the midst of a flock of birds as they rise. One of the reasons why the Luo denude the land of trees is because they give harbourage to their bird enemies.

241 They are wise to insect pests also, and have a greater belief in
136 their remedies than many a farmer has in the aids supplied by our
789 civilization. The medicine is called by two names, " yadh miri " or " yadh lisese." It is employed against a small red and black beetle, called by the Luo " Nyanginja " which eats the flower of the millet, thus preventing a crop. The medicine man who prepares it must be a man of peaceable disposition and character, not a quarreller or disputer with his neighbours. The whole success of the medicine depends on the absence of disputation and quarrelling, and of the grosser forms of vice, like adultery. No adulterer may be supplied
[837] with the medicine, for his very handling of it would nullify its usefulness, not only for himself, but also for his neighbours. All must be peace in the community until the harvest is reaped. Unlike other medicines, which are tied to a pole and left to work their influence, " yadh miri " is made into a decoction, which is sprinkled over the growing crop at eventide. I have seen the operation at a place called Maranda in Sakwa, Central Kavirondo. It was then being used against maize borer. At a time when this pest was giving a good deal of trouble to European farmers, I heard a man who was back in the Reserve on leave from a farm in the Kitale district, pour scorn on the methods used by Europeans with various sprays. He was by way of being one of the more progressive men, but he had nothing but absolute faith in the efficacy of " yadh miri."

578 Crops damaged by domestic stock gave rise to many an angry
685 passion. The owner of the crop had liberty to chastise personally the herdboy (or man) through whose carelessness the stock were left untended. If the herd were a lad he could be cuffed and thumped without being able to proceed against the assailant. Nor did the father protest, provided the chastisement were in reason, for he knew that his son had rendered him liable to a claim for compensation. As likely as not he would add his own quota to the punishment already meted out. If the owner feared that he would get the worst of it in a personal encounter with a herdsman, then he had his remedy at law.

241 When the crop is ready for harvesting it is the duty of the men to do the reaping. In the case of millet, this is a laborious business, calling for judgment, for not all the heads would be ripe, and some must be left to ripen after the bulk has been reaped. It is the task
[462 of the women and children to pack the crop into the grain baskets
857] and carry it to the grain stores. In the case of millet it is quite

241 common to allow some of the sturdier roots to spring up again and give a second crop. I have seen some very fine heads of grain as a result of this method.

251 5718 The crop is stored, unthreshed if millet or maize, in large basket-like receptacles, covered with thatch and standing on stones or supported on forked sticks across which a rough platform is made. It is the work of the man to prepare the grain stores, and I suppose that there is no more prolific source of domestic bickering than these supply. Some men are shiftless, and leave off the preparation of the stores until near to harvest, sometimes exhausting in so doing the patience of the wife. Or he may be neglectful, and leave the thatch unrepaired, rendering the grain liable to suffer from the weather. Many women would far rather see the living hut left in disrepair than that the grain should be imperilled.

251 285 The store varies in size according to the grain for which it is intended. The large size is for millet and maize, the small for the small millet and simsim. The Luo name for them is " dero." The large sizes run up to six feet high by about six feet in diameter. The small about four feet by three. They are made from swamp reeds built in a very coarse basket work fashion, and are finished off with a coating of cow dung inside. The better made stores have provision for access to the grain, by the simple device of cutting away a section from the top of the side, just under the thatch. It used to be the [931] custom for a present of a small basket of grain to be given to the 791 Jabilo or medicine man, after harvest. This custom has already died out in many places.

241 462 It was the woman's first care to secure seed for the next year. Millet and maize was hung in the head, sometimes outside from the branch of a tree, more frequently from the roof of the hut. Smaller grain, and beans were stored in pots in the living hut, and to ensure their being kept in good condition, it was the woman's duty to empty the contents of the pots periodically onto a " thigo " or large circular flat basket work tray, or some part of the courtyard swept clean, that the sun might keep them dry. Lack of seed, owing to a planting dying off from lack of rain was a serious matter. Seed was then begged from neighbours more fortunate.

422 583 Not all the grain went into the common store, for all the cultivation was by no means the common united effort of all the members of the family. The main effort of the members was put into the fields from which all were to draw their food supply, but in addition individual members had their own plots which are called " mondo." The head of the family would have his own " mondo," and the grain from this went into a separate store. This grain formed a reserve in

the negotiations, which is partaken of in a hut, not outside. To this feast three or four friends of each side are invited as witnesses. When the beer drinking stage has been reached, the company sit round the beer pot in a circle, and the provider of the feast takes the long hollow beer-sucker, puts the end provided with a strainer in the pot, takes a few sucks, and then hands it across to the other party with the invitation to drink if he agrees to a matrimonial alliance between the two families taking place. If the second party desires at the last moment to withdraw he declines to drink, but once having accepted the invitation and completed the contract by drinking, it is as irrevocable as a contract can be. The children thus pledged to marry may be so young that the marriage can not take place for years, or the girl may be a child, while the other may be a man already married. The girl so pledged in this way is known in some parts, as in Asembo, as " *nyar osoko*," " the girl of the beer sucker," and the Luo have no stronger matrimonial contract. It is hedged about with potent penalties, mainly magical, in case of any breach of the contract by either of the parties pledged. But even this most binding of all binding contracts is not invariably kept. Occasionally a girl will not submit to the fate marked out for her, and if she can find a man brave enough to join his fortune with hers, they undergo a ceremony, the essential feature of which is the drinking of " medicine " called " *manyasi*." This is supposed to render harmless the evils which would otherwise befall them.

Women are by no means so helpless when bound to their husbands as many are inclined to believe. *In some ways* wives are in a stronger position than are women in lands where magic is not believed in. Luo women have many weapons in their armoury, by which they can bring their husbands into subjection, or perhaps I ought to say, something like subjection. I cannot find that these weapons are resorted to frivolously. A woman has to be hard pushed to bring them into play. One of which we hear a good deal is a curse debarring cohabitation. It is very simple in operation. Striking her thigh with her open palm, the wife vows never to cohabit again. The striking of the thigh is essential. Once this is done dire penalties, sickness of himself and children, will result if the husband attempts to force consent. The fat is now truly in the fire, and the husband has to come to terms with his wife. When he has succeeded in mollifying her " *manyasi*," the medicine already mentioned, is drunk to break the curse. At this stage of social development a belief in magic does serve the needs of women in certain circumstances. She has powers in connection with agriculture which can be devastating. For instance, during her menses no woman must sow seed. In the family of a polygamist lesser wives dare not approach the " *mikayi* " or chief wife to share in the labour at this time. Such contact with the seed would prejudice the crop.

Similarly, during this time she must be careful where she walks. She can ruin a crop by walking through it. But, of course, in this case, she would suffer with the other members of the family.

From early childhood the girl is brought up as an agricultural labourer. There was no class of women divorced from the soil. The only class whose labours in agriculture were lightened were the women who belonged to the divining cult of "SEWE." Sewe is the spirit of divination and is supposed to have descended on those who have been delirious in illness. The delirium is the sign of possession. The devotees of the cult are mainly women, and they are a fairly common sight as they go about their avocation. They are skilled beggars as well as diviners. With their bodies festooned with strings of beads, shells, bells and other barbaric ornaments, they pass from kraal to kraal, and standing with their bodies leaning forward supported by a hand resting on a short stick they sing songs of the countryside and and are rewarded by presents of small baskets of grain. In this way women who have been ill are enabled to help to replenish the grain stores, which have probably run low during the illness.

Gradually a change is coming over the life of the women, due to white influence. Ploughing by the men with teams of oxen, is setting women free for other tasks. This movement is by no means wide-spread, but it has begun, and its effect on the women has been great. Even if the husband has no team and plough himself, many wives do not rest content until the husband has hired a plough owner to come along and plough up the land. It is not unusual for ploughs to be taken 15 miles for this purpose. Again, the use of hand mills of the "Colonist" type, is easing women of much labour at the grind stones. These are much more common than ploughs, probably there are twenty mills for every plough in use. This is partly accounted for by the fact that the mills are turned by hand power, not by oxen. At this labour girls and women take their share, but whereas you would never see a man down on his knees at the grindstone, you do see them turning a mill. New activities are employing the time of many women, and those who have learned to knit or make palm mats in recent years are rapidly increasing in numbers.

CHILD LABOUR:

Generally speaking, from early childhood, all are required to make some contribution to the activities of the home. Girls for the fields, and boys for herding, is the broad division of labour, though the boys also lend a hand in the fields, and, very occasionally, a girl or woman may be seen herding. With the opening up of avenues of wage-earning to the boys on coffee and tea estates, and in other forms of employment, the male child is being made by impercepti- [illegible]

10: Roscoe M-5 (ca. 1900)1915
FL11 Luo FL11

Industries.

241 **Agricultural pursuits.** Agriculture is the principal pursuit of the people and they have now become dependant upon their crops for the grain which forms their chief food. Millet and maize are grown freely and are ground into flour for making porridge. Men and women work together in the fields and dig them for the seed. They use the common hoe with a long handle when digging, and roughly hoe the ground, when rains are expected. Sweet potatoes, beans and sesame are grown more for change of diet and as additions, such as we should call savouries, to the porridge than as necessaries of life. When [302] the crops are a few inches high, the chief and all his people shave their heads, and from that time till harvest no one is allowed to shave again. After harvest the headman shaves and all the people follow his example. Should any one neglect this custom and shave before the time, it is said to be injurious [68] to the crops and to prevent the grain from ripening. The culprit is therefore fined for his heedless conduct. When the corn is in the ear, a goat is killed and the contents of the stomach are scattered about the field to prevent blight and to preserve the crops from being injured by hail-storms.

231 234 [262] **Cow-keeping.** Cows form the principal wealth of the people. The numbers vary in a village according to the prosperity and success of the community. Milk is used as an article of food, especially when sour and clotted, but it is more of a luxury, in the present progressive stage of the tribe, than a necessity; and the meat of the animals is almost entirely reserved for ceremonial use. Cattle are herded by boys and [462] young men, who mix their herds and flocks of goats and sheep. Women and girls are strictly forbidden to herd or to milk cows; they may churn and wash the milk-vessels, but there their duties in connection with cows end. Each village has its cattle, and the young men and boys of the place are responsible for their safety during the day, while they graze on the hill-side. 234 When a cow calves, the calf is left with the dam during the first ten days and the cow is not milked. On the morning of the eleventh day the cow is milked and the milk is churned, the

11:Hartmann M-5 (ca. 1920) 1928 FL11 Luo FL11

764 has not yet gone to live with her husband, the corpse is carried to the village of her husband and buried there, outside the hut which was already built for her.

765 On the 3rd day after the burial of a child the grave is swept, and some of the earth is poured along the wall of the hut without any further ceremonies.

763 If a woman dies who is with child a slight incision is made below her navel, but no attemp is made to save the child.

764 P. S. On the day of the burial of either husband or wife the cattle are not milked. They are driven outside the kraal, but are not herded. When they return at 234 night they are milked, but next morning the milk is not churned. The fresh milk is drunk by the boys of the kraal and the neighbourhood.

765 After the death of a man or a grown up boy no cultivation or weeding of gardens is done by the inhabitant of the kraal for the next 4 days; after the death 241 of a woman or adult girl for the next 3 days. The same regulations holds good on the day of the funeral of a child and on the 3rd day after its burial when the grave is swept.

If either the father or mother of twins dies the whole neighbourhood will abstain from cultivation or weeding for either 4 or 3 days. If one would break these rules the gardens that season would yield no crops or a very poor one.

14: Johnston G-4, 5 (no date) 1904 FL11 Luo FL11

blocks on the upper part of the arm. The wooden blocks are coloured red with oxide of iron. A band strung with small pieces of wood of the same colour is sometimes worn round the forehead. Some of the married men wear a semi-circle of ivory on the forehead, made of the split canine teeth of the hippopotamus. (The tooth, however, I am informed, is not split, but ground down until it is only an eighth of an inch thick.) Others wear the tusks of a wart-hog. The Ja-luo men, like most of the tribes of Nilotic origin, frequently adopt a curious stork-like attitude, standing on some hillock or ant-hill on one leg with the other leg bent and the sole of the foot apposed to the inner side of the knee of the leg on which the body is poised. They usually wear sandals of leather when travelling.

The Ja-luo live much by *agriculture*. They cultivate *sorghum*, *sweet potatoes*, *peas*, *beans*, *elewine*, *pumpkins*, *tobacco*, *and hemp*. Salt is made from the ashes of reeds. They eat practically *all kinds of meat* except the hyæna. Young men eat leopard in order to make them fierce in war. The crested crane is universally protected, and is never killed. The women do not eat fowls, and some women do not eat sheep or eggs. Some eat hippopotamus, and some refuse that meat. Women do not drink milk, but eat it cooked with food. They have a disagreeable custom of mixing *cows'* urine with the milk of the cow. The urine is allowed to stand a day or two in order to increase its flavour. The people say that this admixture increases the amount of butter in the milk. They like the flavour, and think that it has medicinal value. They kill oxen by *sticking* a knife into the jugular vein. The head must be pointed to the west during the operation. Sheep and goats are killed in the same manner. Besides the flesh of fowls, cattle, sheep, and goats, they eat large quantities of fish, which they obtain from the rivers, and, above all, from the waters of the Victoria Nyanza.

Cooking is done entirely by women in earthen pots inside the hut or on the verandah, and the food is served in little wicker baskets. Father and sons eat together in a little separate hut which has open sides. Women eat separately from the men inside their own houses.

They do not *hunt* much with dogs, but catch a good deal of game in pitfalls. They will also attack the elephant with spears. Fish is caught in the Victoria Nyanza by means of large, conical wicker traps called "*dema*." The process is as follows: They bring two very long ropes, one end of each of which is firmly secured to the shore. One rope lies, weighted, along the bottom under the water, the other floats on the surface, but from it hangs a fringe of papyrus stalks. The two ropes above and below correspond with its other, and are connected at intervals with strings to ensure their correspondence, while the fringe of papyrus

20:Ominde I-5 (ca. 1948) 1952
FL11 Luo FL11

855 264 than themselves. As the girls grow older, feeding at odd times is restricted. The girls eat with the mother while their brothers eat with the father. The mother of the family takes particular care that the brothers get some food and even though she may go without herself, she sees that the children eat.

868 *Female education at school-going age.* The traditional education as given by the parents is strictly utilitarian. Its main aim is to prepare the girl for her future as a wife in a family and as a mother of children.

868 312 The girls accompany their mothers or older associates to fetch water, the younger ones being given a very little water in a small pot, usually used for milking. Larger pots are given to the girl as she grows older and stronger, the girls of six and seven being eager to imitate their older playmates. A few of the male children like to go to fetch water with similar containers, but their mothers do not encourage them. The mother of a young girl watches her carefully to see if she is interested in imitating these activities before giving any encouragement.

868 [241] [252] When the girl, at the age of eight or nine, expresses a desire to dig, the mother takes her to a garden early in the morning to let her do so, and releases her at about eight o'clock before the sun becomes too hot. At this time too, if a grinding stone is available, the mother teaches her child to grind corn, this being a continuation of the interest in grinding soil shown at play. The older girls of the group are instructed in giving gruel to the young children they nurse.

868 252 861 In the preparation of food, the girls first learn how to prepare gruel for the babies. But proper cooking comes very gradually and they learn it under the constant observation of the adult members of the family. The food cooked is first tasted by the parents only, when criticisms are openly made and encouragement of future

20:Ominde I-5 (ca. 1948) 1952
FL11 Luo FL11

schooling of wives, but modern young women sometimes rebel against this ordered régime, choosing rather to do as they please in their new homes.

Since the introduction of the plough, the part played by men in the cultivation of the fields has greatly increased. Clearing and ploughing are now done by men, but planting and harvesting are still carried on largely by women.

Women's organizations. In the past, women's activities were limited in number. Apart from the communal dancing parties in which they took a great pride, there existed among certain related families councils to settle disputes and misconduct among women. This communal organization has tended to become weaker with the growing family individuality introduced by modern conditions.

While Christian influence has increased their freedom by releasing women from tribal prejudice and by widening the horizon of men's views, pagan women are still hampered from taking an active part in modern economic and social activities.

Women's organizations range from small religious groups to registered co-operative societies. The management of the co-operative societies is largely in the hands of Christian women. They are thus more progressive than their pagan neighbours, although the gap is rapidly narrowing owing to the influence exercised by Christian women upon the other women in the community.

The changing economy. Before the introduction of a money economy, the garden formed the basis of the economic life of women. Their transactions depended on garden produce which they bartered in exchange for live animals. The more industrious and economical thus acquired considerable wealth, supplementing garden

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21:Huxley Q, T-5 (no date) 1960 FL11 Luo FL11
Kikuyu FL10
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CHAPTER 6

The Reluctant Luo

I

THE Luo are the second largest tribe in Kenya, coming next to the Kikuyu, and at the moment the most influential politically. This is because most Kikuyu politicians went into detention camps at the time of Mau Mau. While Kikuyu cats were away, Luo mice played vigorously, and grabbed the best political cheese. Speaking generally, the Luo are hefty, black-skinned, somewhat ox-like people with prominent teeth, a reputation for making good labourers and a rather slow-witted approach to life.

Needless to say, there are plenty of exceptions. Mr. Tom Mboya is a Luo and, while he has been called many things, 'slow-witted' has never been among them. Their natural food is fish and they are not by nature a cattle people. Their sturdy women smoke pipes with long clay stems. The Luo are not Bantu but Nilotic and their affinities, lingual and tribal, lie more with people in Uganda, such as the Acholi, than with any other Kenya tribes. They are surrounded, however, by Bantu peoples, with whom they share the wide, fertile, steamy and mainly flat basin that surrounds Lake Victoria. Around this basin lie hills from which warrior tribes look down on them, formerly as an eagle looked upon its prey. Far to the south lie the plains of Masai.

People who have dealt with other tribes find the Luo difficult. Their obstinacy is legendary, they are inclined to be sullen and suspicious. The Kikuyu can be all these things, but they are nimble-minded, subtle and, for those they like, have charm. Luo people can be brave and loyal but charm is rarely among their attributes. They are faintly Teutonic, in an African fashion.

So it is not surprising that of all the major Kenya peoples, leaving aside the Masai, the Luo have put up the stiffest

21:Huxley Q, T-5 (no date) 1960 FL11 Luo FL11

resistance to the forward march of Progress in the agricultural field. No spontaneous wish for any branch of Progress except the political seems to have gripped the collective Luo mind. Here, on these hot and apathetic lakeland flats, all the impetus has come from Europeans.

It might be argued that the Government has no call to make people change their ways against their will. This indeed is an argument much used by Luo politicians. It is an old story: should nanny sit by and watch Master Robert break up his toys—in this case, ruin the soil, create acute erosion, turn the whole of Nyanza province, which contains one-third of Kenya's population, into a great rural slum?

Beyond question, that was going on. In Nyanza province there are over two million cattle, about one to every two acres. It would be a job to support this rate of stocking on the finest pastures under skilled management; here it is utterly impossible. The cattle have become so small and shrivelled that they are really not much larger than Great Danes, but their sharp hoofs can still make and deepen gullies as they track a way to springs. During the last three years, the output of crops in the province has halved, because yields have dropped so sharply. Yet there are more and more mouths to feed.

All the evils of land abuse were here displayed in concentrated form. No manure, no rotations, no resting land under grass; maize or cotton again and again, planted too late and in the wrong manner; no trees, communal grazing destroyed by useless skinny little beasts. It was not for want of trying by the technical staff. For years they had been urging, persuading, bullying, demonstrating, and they had scarcely dented Luo indifference and complacency. Famine was beginning to threaten these overcrowded areas—for the one thing the people continued to produce more and more of was their own kind.

II

And so the Government decided that the only salvation for the Luo lay in dividing their communally owned land into individual holdings. Land consolidation—the first stage

21:Huxley Q, T-5 (no date) 1960 FL11 Luo FL11

telling the rice-growers they must make and maintain their own bunds. Last season the output jumped to 50,000 bags.

III

We drove to Nyabondo across the Kano plains. No one loves these plains. They are not only flat, they are absolutely treeless, dry, cracked, windswept, overcrowded, dusty and mean. The soil is 'black cotton', an especially viscous clay in which any vehicle bogs down irrevocably in wet weather—very fertile potentially, but soul-destroying to work. 'The people are like their soil,' I was told. 'They break your heart and yet you go on trying, something's there.'

Everywhere are circles of a particular euphorbia, a dark-green, harsh, ugly plant that grows about eight feet tall and surrounds every group of huts. When a family head dies, his homestead is evacuated, his huts are left to rot away and only the euphorbia hedge remains, so the plains are covered with old circles as well as those in use. People have tried planting eucalyptus trees, but white ants eat them before they are man-high.

No individual cultivates his land in one piece. He digs or ploughs a patch here, a patch there, another bit over there, two more bits down the hill and a piece two miles off across the valley that belonged to his mother's uncle. This is known as fragmentation; it is almost universal among Bantu people, exists also among others such as the Luo, and is like a net spread for the feet of Progress in which he becomes enmeshed and stultified.

The first stage of land enclosure must be for every cultivator to exchange fragments with his neighbours, so that all his land is gathered together in one piece. It is the first stage and also the hardest; land is life's blood to the people; it is like exhorting men to exchange their blood, or their children. Suspicions dart out of their holes like bee-eaters. Won't so-and-so, my neighbour, get an unfair share? The bit he wants to swap for my piece is smaller. Give up my fertile patch by the river where bananas flourish for that barren stretch of hillside? Never! Somewhere there is a trick in all this. . . .

21:Huxley Q, T-5 (no date) 1960 FL11 Luo FL11

IV

After Mr. Onyango had spoken, others said their piece, and I asked the opinions of some of the women, who will never speak unless they are directly asked. One replied, through an interpreter, in these words:

'I was against consolidation. My own land was fertile and I did not want to lose it and have other land not as good as mine. I tried to persuade my husband. We had many arguments, and the peace of our house was destroyed. At last I saw that I must give in if our home was to become peaceful again. We exchanged gardens, and then I saw that the new gardens were as fertile as my own. Now the men are helping women on the land and this is something that has never happened before. Men and women are working together. This is because the men see that there is money in growing crops and that bigger crops will make them rich.'

A second woman—both were middle-aged—spoke after her.

'I was not of that opinion. I wanted consolidation before it came here. If you have land near your home, you can work to improve it. If it is a long way off, you cannot put on manure. I understood the value of manure by seeing crops grown by the Better Farmers. Before, I had four *shambas* and one was over a mile away. Now they are all together and near my home. There is only one difficulty. Our custom is, when a son gets married, he leaves his father's *shamba* to start one of his own. I do not want to break this custom, but now I have a married son and there is nowhere for him to go.'

And a third woman, rather older, added her piece.

'I was in favour of consolidation too. The boundaries of land have caused many disputes and quarrels amongst us. When there are fixed boundaries, these quarrels fade away. So I wanted consolidation before it came, and my husband agreed. Now I can farm properly and put manure on the *shamba*; we have a shed for the cattle to stay in at night. Besides that, my husband employs two men. When he goes away I supervise them and the work is not so hard. Men and women never worked together before. Now they do, and this is a big thing.'